



## Grant Writers' Other Role

*They're more than "just writers."*

BY IRENE ZOLA

**W**hether you have in-house grant writers or bring in consultants, there's a good chance that you're not taking full advantage of all they have to offer. As a nonprofit manager, it's up to you to help create an environment where the grant writer's expertise can be fully employed.

### **Encourage a Partnership between the Grant Writer and Program Director**

For optimal results, grant writers should begin work before the program is even a twinkle in the program developer's eye. Managers with foresight will invite the grant writer to sit in on early planning meetings, along with program development staff. It's at this stage that the grant writer can critically impact the project's essence.

Since donors are more likely to contribute to specific programs than

to general expenses, you must develop programs with funders' concerns in mind. Grant writers can play a crucial role in this process. Because they know so much about funders' interests, they can help create programs that meet your organization's aims and are most likely to receive support.

### **Preparing the Way for Proposal Writing**

Nonprofit personnel often see grant writers as people who write up the development office's ideas. They don't realize that grant writers have a great deal of knowledge about funders that can be invaluable in deciding where to seek a grant and the best way to approach a prospective funder. After they help create a new program, grant writers can review literature, including grant guidelines, to help decide which funder is most likely to support it and which

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approach offers the greatest likelihood of success. In other situations, when prospective donors have already been identified, the grant writer can help program developers plan programs that are specifically targeted to the donor's interests, while maintaining the organization's integrity. Only after discussions such as these is it time to sit down and write the proposal.

### Open-Door Policy

Grant writers often bring new ideas that break with traditional programming and grant-seeking. The impulse may be to turn away the messenger rather than accept the unwelcome news. For instance, grant writers understand that funders are more progressive than most people think. Nowadays, funders base their grantmaking decisions on cutting-edge research about what works. They demand innovative

solutions, especially when traditional methods have proved inadequate. But because it means coming up with totally new approaches, program personnel may be predisposed to eschew this new information.

As a nonprofit manager, you can do a great deal to nurture the collaborative relationship between program developers and grant writers. Set up regular briefing sessions, luncheons, or ad hoc meetings to encourage dialogue. Show program developers that you view grant writers as an essential part of the program-development team.

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### Joining Hands.

Grant writers do their best work as part of a team. When all members of the program envisionment team work in concert, they will find valuable resources in each other. Together, they have the best chance of planning strong, successful programs. ■

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These references are available from the Society's Resource Center, 608-274-9777 or [www.danenet.org/snpo](http://www.danenet.org/snpo).

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